Canada rejects most Indian permit pleas over fraud fears

Improved verification system detects over 14,000 potentially fraudulent letters of acceptance from all applicants

TORONTO: Canada's clampdown on international students has hit applicants from India particularly hard, government data shows, as what was once a preferred destination loses its allure for Indian students.

Canada lowered the number of international student permits it issues for the second year in a row in early 2025 as part of a broader effort to reduce the number of temporary migrants and address fraud related to student visas. About 74 per cent of Indian applications for permits to study at Canadian post-secondary institutions in August — the most recent month available were rejected, compared to about 32pc in August 2023, according to immigration department data.

By contrast, about 40pc of study permit applications overall in each of those months were refused. About 24pc of Chinese study permits in August 2025 were rejected. The number of Indian applicants has dropped, as well, from 20,900 in August 2023 — when Indians formed just over one quarter of all applicants — to 4,515 in August 2025.

India has been Canada's top source of international students over the past decade. In August, it also had the highest study-permit refusal rate of any country with more than 1,000 approved applicants. The spike in refusals of would-be students comes as Canada and India seek to mend ties after more than a year of tension.

Former Prime Minister Justin Trudeau accused the Indian government of involvement in the 2023 murder of a Canadian in Surrey, British Columbia.

Crackdown on fraud

In 2023, Canadian authorities uncovered nearly 1,550 study permit applications linked to fraudulent letters of acceptance, most of which originated from India, Canada's immigration department said in an email.

Last year its beefed-up verification system detected more than 14,000 potentially fraudulent letters of acceptance from all applicants, it said. Canada has implemented enhanced verification for international students and has increased its financial requirements for applicants, the immigration department spokesperson said.

The Indian embassy in Ottawa said the rejection of study permit applications from students in India had come to its attention, but that the issuance of study permits is Canada's prerogative.

"However, we would like to emphasize that some of the best quality students available in the world are from India, and Canadian institutions have in the past greatly benefited from the talent and academic excellence of these students," the embassy said in a statement.

Canada's Foreign Affairs Minister Anita Anand said during an October visit to India that Canada's government is concerned about the integrity of its immigration system but wants to continue having Indian students in Canada.

Drop in Indian enrollment

People who work with would-be international students say they are seeing a higher level of applicant scrutiny. Michael Pietrocarlo of Border Pass, which helps people apply for Canadian visas, said his firm prepares applicants to show their eligibility beyond what's required on paper.

He says, for example, when students must demonstrate they have sufficient funds to support themselves, "it's not enough just to say, 'Here are some bank statements.' They may have to go the extra mile and say, 'Here's where the money came from.'" The University of Waterloo, home to Canada's largest engineering school, has seen a two-thirds decline in the number of students from India entering its undergraduate and graduate programmes over the past three to four years. Ian VanderBurgh, its associate vice president of strategic enrollment management, said the drop was largely due to a government cap on foreign student visas and had altered the composition of the student body.

We pride ourselves on being an international university, he said. The University of Regina and the University of Saskatchewan have also reported a decline in the number of Indian students enrolled. When Jaspreet Singh, who founded the International Sikh Students Association, came to Canada from India in 2015 to study mechanical engineering, he remembers government posters exhorting newcomers to "Study, work, stay" in the country. That attitude has soured, he said. Singh is not surprised at the higher rejection rate for Indian study permit applicants, saying he knows fraud is a concern. But as it becomes harder to get permanent residency or a job in Canada, he says some of those recently rejected appear to not mind: "They are happy they didn't come."—Reuters

A JUNE 10, 2022, file photo shows students attending a convocation as the University of Toronto began the first in-person ceremonies since Covid-19 pandemic.—Reuters

A BULLDOZER removes the wreckage of a vehicle targeted by an Israeli drone strike in Nabatieh, south Lebanon.—AFP

Israeli strikes kill two in south Lebanon

BEIRUT: Israeli strikes on southern Lebanon killed two people and wounded seven others on Monday, the Lebanese health ministry said, as Israel said it killed two members of Hezbollah.

Israel in recent days threatened to expand its attacks against the group. In a preliminary toll, the ministry said that an "Israeli enemy strike" on the town of Doueir in Nabatiyeh district killed one person and wounded seven others.

The second strike on Aita al-Shaab in the Bint Jbeil district also killed one person, according to the ministry.

Lebanon's state-run National News Agency reported that an Israeli drone targeted a car in Doueir, causing it to catch fire. The Israeli military said it killed Mohammed Ali Hadid, alleging he was "a commander in Hezbollah's Radwan Force in the Nabatieh area" who tried to "reestablish Hezbollah terror infrastructure sites".

In Aita al-Shaab, the army said it killed a Hezbollah member who "was observed attempting to gather intelligence on (Israeli) troops". A photographer in Doueir saw firefighters extinguishing flames in the targeted vehicle and around five other damaged cars.

He also saw workers removing shattered glass from shops damaged by the blast.

The NNA said that the strike caused damage to a local shopping centre. —AFP

Christian, Muslim Nigerians push back over US threat

ABUJA: Nigerians across the religious spectrum pushed back on Monday on US President Donald Trump's threats of military intervention over the killing of Christians in the country.

Africa's most populous country, which is roughly evenly split between a mostly Christian south and Muslim-majority north, is home to myriad conflicts, which experts say kill both Christians and Muslims, often without distinction.

But claims of Christian "persecution" in Nigeria have found traction online among the US and European right in recent months.

"Christians are being killed, we can't deny the fact that Muslims are (also) being killed," Danjuma Dickson Auta, a Christian and community leader, said.

Trump said on social media over the weekend that he had asked the Pentagon to map out a plan of attack.

Asked by a reporter aboard Air Force One if he was considering putting US troops on the ground or using air strikes, Trump replied: "Could be, I mean, a lot of things -- I envisage a lot of things." "They're killing the Christians and killing them in very large numbers," he said on Sunday. "We're not going to allow that to happen."

Pushing back on the accusations, Nigerian President Bola Tinubu said religious tolerance was "a core tenet of our collective identity".—AFP

Khamenei rejects cooperation with US while it backs Israel

TEHRAN: Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said on Monday that Tehran would only consider cooperation with the United States if it changed its policy in the region including supporting Israel.

"If they completely abandon support for the Zionist regime, withdraw their military bases from here (the region), and refrain from interfering in this region, then it (cooperation) can be considered," said Khamenei.

"The arrogant nature of the United States accepts nothing other than submission." The remarks came during a gathering with students in Tehran marking the anniversary of the 1979 takeover of the US embassy following the Islamic Revolution which toppled the Western-backed Shah. In mid-June, Israel launched an unprecedented bombing campaign against Iran, triggering a war which saw the US join briefly with strikes on Iranian nuclear sites.

The 12-day war with Israel, which prompted an Iranian response with missile and drone strikes, derailed nuclear talks between Tehran and Washington which had begun in April. A ceasefire between Iran and Israel has been in place since June 24.

"If the country becomes strong and the enemy realises that confronting this strong nation will not yield profit but will bring loss, the country will certainly gain immunity," Khamenei added.

Khamenei's comments came as President Donald Trump's administration seeks to increase pressure on Iran.

"The Americans sometimes say they would like to cooperate with Iran. Cooperation with Iran is not possible as long as the US continues to support the accursed Zionist regime, maintains military bases, and interferes in the region," Khamenei said, according to state media.Trump said in October that the US is prepared to make a deal with Iran when Tehran is ready to do so, saying: "The hand of friendship and cooperation [with Iran] is open."

The two countries held five rounds of nuclear talks, prior to a 12-day war between Iran and Israel in June, which Washington joined by striking key Iranian nuclear sites.

Talks between the two sides have faced major stumbling blocks such as the issue of uranium enrichment on Iranian soil, which Western powers want to bring down to zero to minimise any risk of weaponisation, a plan that Tehran has rejected.

Iran has been reeling under years of international sanctions, especially after the United States in 2018 withdrew from a nuclear accord and reimposed sanctions.

In September, the United Nations reinstated sanctions under the so-called "snapback" mechanism after Britain, France and Germany triggered the process.

On Sunday, Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said in an interview with Al Jazeera that Tehran remained "ready to enter negotiations" with Washington, but only on its nuclear programme, ruling out any talks on its missile capabilities.

He added that talks could resume "whenever the Americans are ready to negotiate on an equal footing and based on mutual interests. Apparently, they are not in a hurry. We are not in a hurry either."—Agencies

Demand to end terror from Afghan soil 'non-negotiable'

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with 1,667 terrorists killed.

Gen Chaudhry disclosed that 206 Afghan Taliban fighters and 112 TTP terrorists were killed during the recent border tensions.

Pointing to growing participation of Afghans in TTP and subsequent blurring of lines between the two groups, he said about 60 per cent of the terrorists killed during infiltration attempts in the last three to four months were Afghan nationals.

Afghan Tailban's support to TTP

"The TTP is not a separate entity, it is a branch of the Afghan Taliban," Gen Chaudhry observed, explaining that the outfit had sworn allegiance to the Taliban's emir, "and we have clear evidence that the Taliban are settling TTP fighters in densely populated areas to provide them a protective shield".

He added that while Pakistan continues efforts to settle matters peacefully with Afghanistan, "there can be no compromise on our security and sovereignty".

The spokesman dismissed recent Taliban statements suggesting preconditions for dialogue, including demands that Pakistan end alleged support for the Islamic State-Khorasan Province (ISKP) and anti-Taliban propaganda. "Such conditions are meaningless. The only meaningful step is verifiable action against terrorists," he said.

US drone operations

He categorically denied reports in "Afghan and Indian media" about a supposed secret US-Pakistan understanding allowing American drone operations in Afghanistan.

"This is fake news propagated by Zabihullah Mujahid," the Taliban spokesman, he said. "Pakistan has not given permission to the US or any other country to use its territory for attacks inside Afghanistan. These claims are baseless propaganda."

Pakistani officials view the Istanbul process as a test of the Taliban's credibility. A senior security source said last week that Pakistan expects "credible evidence of action including dismantling of hideouts, disruption of logistical networks, and arrests of TTP leadership."

False flag operation

The military spokesman warned that India was planning a "false flag" operation in the maritime domain to fabricate evidence of a major Pakistani strike or act of aggression, potentially triggering a new round of tensions between the two nuclear-armed rivals.

Gen Chaudhry, citing intelligence reports, indicated India could stage the incident "in deep waters," portraying it as a Pakistani attack to justify escalation and malign Islamabad internationally.

He said Pakistan's armed forces were on "high alert" and would deliver a "far stronger, more decisive, and severe" response than in previous incidents if provoked.

Security observers say the military's unusually pointed warning coincides with several converging developments that Pakistan views as provocative or politically timed including India's Trishul exercise, Bihar state elections, and regional tensions.

Last Saturday, the government released a video confession by Ijaz Mallah, a fisherman from Sindh who had been detained by Indian forces in 2024. In the video, Malah claims he was coerced by India's external intelligence agency, RAW, to engage in espionage-related activities in Pakistan.

ISPR officials cited the testimony as partial evidence of Indian maritime sabotage plans, connecting it to what they describe as a "covert Indian terror network" disrupted earlier this year.

Gaza peace force

The military spokesman said that any decision regarding the deployment of Pakistani troops to a proposed Gaza peacekeeping force would be made by the government and parliament.

His comments came amid reports that Pakistan is weighing a potential contribution of troops to an International Stabilization Force (ISF) for Gaza.

The proposed mission could also include disarmament and security enforcement tasks, which have drawn criticism from opposition parties. They argue the government has not held a full parliamentary debate and warn that participation without clear UN oversight could risk Pakistan's complicity in coercive actions against Palestinians.

Muslim bloc insists on UN mandate for Gaza force

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force, and insiders privy to developments say that a formal announcement is expected soon. However, much like Germany and Jordan, Islamabad would prefer to have any deployment to Gaza under the UN umbrella.

"First, a general consensus needs to be reached on a draft, then it needs to be approved by the members of the Security Council.

"And it needs to be free from vetoes by any of the permanent (UNSC) members," Mr Fidan said of a blocking move frequently used by key Israel ally Washington.

Israel has long viewed Turkey's diplomatic overtures with suspicion over Ankara's close ties with Hamas and adamantly opposes it joining the task force that is meant to take over after Israeli troops withdraw from Gaza.

"Our principle is that Palestinians should govern the Palestinians and ensure their own security, the international community should support this in the best possible way -- diplomatically, institutionally and economically," Mr Fidan said. "Nobody wants to see a new system of tutelage emerge," he said.

"We've now reached an extremely critical stage: we do not want the genocide in Gaza to resume," Mr Fidan added, saying all seven nations supported plans for the Palestinians to take control of Gaza's security and governance.

Mr Fidan, who also held talks at the weekend with a Hamas delegation led by its chief negotiator Khalil al-Hayya, said the movement was "ready to hand Gaza to a committee of Palestinians".

He also expressed hope that reconciliation efforts between Hamas and the rival West Bank-based Palestinian Authority, "will bear fruit as soon as possible," saying inter-Palestinian unity would "strengthen Palestine's representation in the international community".

Hamas in compliance

Earlier on Monday, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Hamas appeared committed to the truce, pointing the finger of blame at Israel.

"It seems Hamas is quite determined to adhere to the agreement while Israel's record is very poor," he told an Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) gathering in Istanbul, saying Muslim states should play "a leading role" in Gaza's recovery.

"At this point, we need to deliver more humanitarian aid to the people of Gaza and then begin reconstruction efforts. "The Israeli government is doing everything in its power to prevent this," Mr Erdogan said.

He also urged Muslim states to play "a leading role" in Gaza's recovery. "We believe the reconstruction plan prepared by the Arab League and the OIC (Organisation of Islamic Cooperation) should be implemented immediately," he said of the plan unveiled in March.

Ceasefire violations denounced

Meanwhile, Pakistan's Foreign Office said that Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar, along with other "Arab-Islamic foreign ministers", deliberated on the way forward for a lasting ceasefire and sustainable peace in Gaza.

"The leaders jointly called for urgent humanitarian aid for the Palestinians, condemned Israeli ceasefire violations, demanded Israel's withdrawal from the Occupied Palestinian Territory and emphasised the rebuilding of Gaza," the statement added.

"Pakistan reaffirmed its principled stance for the establishment of an independent, viable and contiguous State of Palestine based on pre-1967 borders, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, in line with the UN and OIC resolutions," it said.—Agencies

A RESEARCHER examines microplastic fragments collected from seawater samples.—Reuters

Mussels reveal microplastic pollution in Greek waters

SARONIC: Overtourism and heavy maritime traffic across the Mediterranean are contributing to a rise in pollution in Greece's azure waters, say Greek scientists who have deployed thousands of mussels on the seafloor to help detect microplastics.

Mussels, filter-feeding organisms that absorb a range of contaminants into their tissue, including invisible microplastics, have been used globally for decades as a barometer of marine pollution.

Researchers at the Hellenic Centre for Marine Research (HCMR) have been using them in Greece, whose pristine beaches and limpid seas lure millions of tourists annually.

In May, they submerged cages with mussels at various depths and locations across Greece, from busy ports to remote islands. They retrieved them in September to analyse the particles the mussels had accumulated. To test surface water, they use a floating net device.

"It blows your head that in just two kilometres you can collect all these tiny microplastics," said oceanographer Argyro Adamopoulou, from the HCMR laboratory, referring to samples collected from the net that filters the water.

The entire Mediterranean Sea, a semi-enclosed basin, has become a hotspot for microplastics, the scientists said.

"The particles retrieved in Greece varied in shape from fragments to film, microfibres, or pellets and were mostly blue or transparent, indicating that they came from single-use plastics, such as rubbish bags and water bottles," said HCMR biologist Nikoletta Digka.—Reuters

Sole survivor of Air India crash has painful memories

LONDON: The only survivor of June's Air India crash has told UK media of the mental and physical anguish he has endured since surviving the deadly disaster in the Indian city of Ahmedabad.

Vishwash Kumar Ramesh said in the interviews aired and published on Monday that the months following the crash, which killed 241 passengers on the London-bound plane and another 19 people on the ground, had been "very difficult".

The British citizen, who lives in Leicester, central England, walked away from the plane wreckage, in what he has called "a miracle", but lost his brother.

"God gave me life but took all my happiness, and from my family," the 39-year-old told Britain's domestic Press Association news agency.

"It completely brought down my family... It's very difficult for me and my family." He added that his brother, Ajay, "was my strength" and "my everything".

The Boeing 787-8 Dreamliner crashed shortly after take-off from Ahmedabad in western India on June 12, smashing into a medical college.

A preliminary investigation report by India's Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB) said fuel to the jet's engines was cut off moments before impact.

It did not offer any other firm conclusions or apportion blame for the disaster. It emerged last month that the father of one of the pilots has asked India's top court for an independent investigation, arguing the official probe was unfairly blaming the crew.—AFP